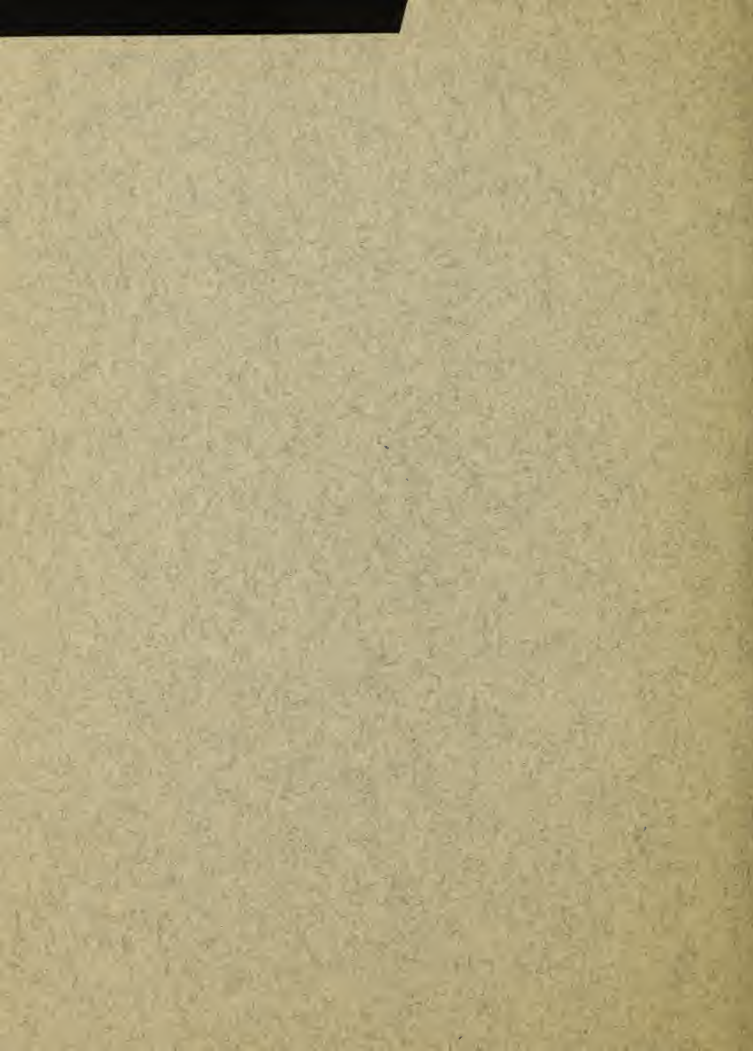


THE
Missionary Opportunities
of the
HOSPITAL SISTER

by

Rev. Joseph P. Donovan, C. M., J. C. D.



Vocations - Women

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John Luntan

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THE Missionary Opportunities of the HOSPITAL SISTER

Karl Adam in his *Spirit of Catholicism* says a thing that no priest or religious should ever forget. He reminds us that in the Church of God only the papacy is divinely preserved from institutionalizing. The pope can't institutionalize, but any other person or group of persons can. And history declares spiritual atrophy oftentimes sets in at the very time when individuals and church corporations appeared to be exercising their greatest activity. So hospitals and hospital Sisters can be very progressive in certain desirable lines and still be badly institutionalized as far as the higher and better things are concerned. They both can unconsciously reach a point where they differ from secular hospitals and their personnels only by having crucifixes in the rooms and by having religious garbs covering the much standardized Nurses. For such Sisters hospital work becomes just a business venture; whereas God and His Church intends it to remain always an important form

of missionary enterprise. And if Sisters collectively and individually are going to make hospital work a missionary endeavor, they must be ever mindful of the Master's injunction—*Seek first the kingdom of God and His justice and all things else shall be added unto you*—an injunction which if heeded keeps us constantly in a supernatural attitude of mind.

That attitude alone is half the apostolate to which hospital Sisters are called. That attitude causes institutions to measure their success by the amount of good done for souls. The medical and the surgical treatment plus the nursing are merely the occasions of exercising one phase of the Church's general apostolate. The apostolate of giving health to souls here that hereafter they may live unto Christ, the immortal One. That attitude makes individual religious rejoice only in their missionary achievements. It sends them forth each day in quest of souls which they may help or of souls they may save just as a similar spirit drives their companions in India and China to go out to look for abandoned infants and to dispute with vagrant dogs the possession of their still living bodies. Thus in order that a moment after those mangled human frames may be given through the waters of baptism a part in the Resurrection and the Life. Thieves for paradise in ever swelling numbers must be credited to missionary Sisters in fields

anear as well as missionary Sisters in fields afar.

The widows of Joppe long ago showed Peter as he stood before the bier of Dorcas the coats and garments that she who lay thereon had made for them. So when a hospital Sister is being judged the helped souls and the saved souls will show to Peter's Lord and Master the riches of sanctifying grace that they have procured at the hands of their Sister benefactress. The Joppe widows pleaded for the return to life of this mother of theirs; and Peter bade her rise and gave her back to them. The pleaders in heaven will cause the Saviour to say to their Sister Benefactress: "Each one of these souls is a pledge of your salvation in accordance with the promise of My Father by the mouth of the apostle James; each you have converted and thereby not only covered a multitude of sins but also gained an additional title to a very special mansion in the house of My Father."

The apostolate of the hospital Sister is manifold; and for the most part, I think, is well discharged. There is in most hospitals the religious library, at least in the form of the book rack. There is always carefulness when a Catholic is brought in and is found to be in dangerous condition to see that he gets the benefit of the absolving words of the priest and of the nourishing Bread of the strong. Although I do think that here and there devotion

towards the Sacrament of health leaves a great deal to be desired. Sisters are found to be as squeamish as ill instructed or over-sensitive as lay folk when the duty is present of urging Extreme Unction upon the unwary sick. Those Sisters are too human and not enough divine to tell or have the priest tell the unsuspecting patient that he is in serious enough condition to have the benefit of the Healing Sacrament. The result is that many a person goes to an untimely death, who otherwise would have lived and increased his merit; or else goes into eternity minus the Sacramental helps he is entitled to, without having the wrinkles and scars of sin rubbed off his soul by the laving graces of the Last Anointing. But there is a way of actually saving souls that is nowhere adverted to in its full possibilities and in some places scarcely known. I refer to the manner of saving the non-Catholic who cannot bring himself or herself to seek express admission into the Catholic Church.

In this regard I realize that Sisters quite generally and althogether laudably administer conditional baptism to dying non-Catholics. The practice is commendable as spiritual emergency treatment. A person is brought in unconscious who appears not to be a Catholic. He has only a moment to live and a priest is not near. The Sister baptizes him conditionally, She could do nothing else for his soul. If that

person wanted to save his soul; was not validly baptized; and were to make an imperfect act of contrition before death, the Sister has already accomplished more than if she had restored a stricken world to prosperity. But many, many non-Catholics will never be able to profit by either conditional baptism or conditional absolution, because through want of instruction or through want of disposing prayer they lack the dispositions to profit by the saving graces of the Sacraments.

We all know if we but reflect upon our religious teaching that there is no salvation for a person who has arrived at the use of reason unless he has made at least an implicit act of faith. And no one is certainly capable of eliciting a valid act of faith without believing *explicitly* (that is, in set terms) in the two great mysteries of the Most Holy Trinity and the Incarnation. I concede that *perhaps* a person might be saved who believed explicitly only in the existence of God as the Author of the supernatural, all that was required of the faithful before the coming of Christ. In that event a Jew or a Mohammedan would be able to make a salutary act of faith, ignorant as he is of the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation. But this is but problematical. And where there is question of necessary, absolute ends, we can never use doubtful means. Hence a repentant baptized person or an honest

candidate for baptism must be instructed in those two great mysteries of the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation. Otherwise the grace of absolution or the grace of baptisms is much imperiled. If time permitted, we would sin grievously to omit giving this minimum of instruction.

Yet, never have I found a seminarion starting theology or a high school pupil or a college student who could tell me how to give spiritual first aid to a dying person entirely ignorant of his religion. I have even read such a loose answer to a radio question as, that a person by the light of reason could know of the existence of God and could be sorry for his sins, therefore could have the baptism of desire. The truth is that a person thus ignorant of the very fundamentals of the supernatural, of the first words of divine revelation, could no more have the baptism of desire than an unbaptized infant could. For the baptism of desire implies a perfect act of divine love; and a perfect act of divine love is inconceivable without at least an implied act of divine faith, the latter demanding for safety sake an explicit belief in the Most Holy Trinity and the Incarnation.

Right here is where we come to what might be called a great supernatural invention. I mean the *Credenda* prayers edited by the Very Reverend Raphael J. Markham, S.T.D. of Mount

Saint Mary's Seminary, Cincinnati. Doctor Markham has drawn up a set of short prayers that contain everything necessary to make saving acts of faith, hope, charity and contrition. (I append these prayers with the announcement that Doctor Markham gives full permission for their copying and use anywhere or in any manner.) He has most considerately left out all mention in the prayers of the Holy Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church. For we are dealing with prospective embryonic Christians or Catholics who are not sufficiently matured to accept explicitly more than the fundamental mysteries of the Faith. To try to give them the fullness of Christian life would prevent their getting even the germ of that life. We need not give them more than we give dying Catholics entirely ignorant of their faith and apparently living in mortal sin. We need give both classes only the mysteries necessary to be believed explicitly for salvation, the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation.

The practical point I would drive home to every Sister here and through her to every hospital Sister in the United States and Canada is to begin using these *Credenda* prayers forthwith, especially with the dying and those in danger of death. The only caution I would counsel is not to put them into the hands of Jewish patients, unless these later show some

leanings towards Christianity. For they will rightly resent what will appear to them as an attempt to proselytize. And in most cases the effort would be likely to prove useless. Their own Judaic faith may enable them to save their souls, just as the Christian knowing only God as the Author of the supernatural may save his soul, that is, it is probable, not certain he may. But every non-Jewish patient may be given the *Credenda* prayers, because every such non-Jewish patient will be either a Christian or the descendant of a Christian. And as such he is either instructed or refreshed in the beliefs that he has at heart. Then before God he is either baptized or unbaptized. If he is baptized, and your encouragement brings him to the point where he makes a perfect act of contrition, you have saved a soul in flight to God. If he is not baptized and you get him no further than an act of imperfect contrition, then the conditional baptism you administer, either openly or secretly, will avail unto salvation. And where there is any reason for believing in the validity of the previous baptism, a passing priest can bestow conditional absolution without notifying the Catholic-at-heart that such is being done. By that expedient is rendered secure the salvation of one who may be baptized and yet has only imperfect contrition for his sins. If any of these persons recover, the graces received will operate

towards making the Catholic-at-heart a Catholic-in-fact.

When we recall that most of our non-Catholics have not gone through even the ceremony of baptism; that of those who have, most are but doubtfully baptized; and that the huge part of them all are without either the necessary knowledge or the necessary inclination to sorrow for their sins so as to supernaturalize their souls by rebirth or absolutional resurrection, we can but marvel at the whiten-fields that are ours to harvest. And the forthright attempt, honest and persevering, to harvest them will save both ourselves and dear religious families from institutionalizing.

Paper prepared for the National Catholic Hospital Association Convention, St. Louis, Mo., June 1933, by the Reverend Joseph P. Donovan, C. M., J. C. D., Kenrick Seminary, Webster Groves, Mo.

A PRAYER
TO REVIVE AND STRENGTHEN FAITH

I BELIEVE in one God. I believe that God rewards the good and punishes the wicked.

I BELIEVE that in God there are three Divine Persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.

I BELIEVE that God the Son became Man, without ceasing to be God. I believe that He is my Lord and my Saviour, the Redeemer of the human race, that He died on the Cross for the salvation of all men, and that He died also for me.

I BELIEVE everything else that God has taught and revealed.

O my God, Who art all-good and all-merciful, I sincerely hope to be saved, and I want to do all that is necessary for my salvation according to Thy holy will.

I have committed serious sins in my life, but now I turn from them, and hate them. I am sorry for all of them, because I have offended Thee my God, Who art all-good, all-perfect, all-holy, all-merciful and kind, and Who died on the Cross for me, I love Thee, O my God, with all my heart, I ask Thy pardon, and promise Thee, by the help of Thy grace, never again to commit serious sin.

MY GOD, HAVE MERCY ON ME
A SINNER

